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# The INQUIRER

THE UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN PAPER

Established 1842

The Inquirer is the oldest  
Nonconformist religious newspaper

**"To promote a free and inquiring religion through the worship of God and the celebration of life; the service of humanity and respect for all creation; and the upholding of the liberal Christian tradition."**

*From the Object passed at the  
General Assembly of the Unitarian and  
Free Christian Churches 2001*

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**Cover** Dundee and Edinburgh Unitarians spent an intergenerational 'Fresh Sparks' day together.

**Articles** express the views of their authors. Submissions are welcome and may be edited for content and length. They should be emailed or typed and should be the author's original work or be attributed.

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## Inquiring Words

'Once an old woman at my church said the secret is that God loves us *exactly* the way we are *and* that he loves us too much to let us stay like this, and I'm just trying to trust that.'

— Anne Lamott



Olympic Opening Ceremony photo by Nick Webb via Wikimedia Commons

### Editor's view

## Tim Berners-Lee takes a bow

It feels like such a long time ago now, but wasn't it a fantastic moment when Sir Tim Berners-Lee took a bow in the Opening Ceremonies of the Olympics? I love that someone came up with that idea, to applaud someone whose skills and ethos have given humankind a fantastic tool; someone who made the conscious choice not to sell his work to the highest bidder, but to create something for all of us.

The internet has changed our lives and made so many things possible – no doubt many that even Sir Tim could not anticipate.

It would be a completely different marketplace, (and likely *only* a marketplace) if access to the web were governed by corporations or governments.

So for his choice *not* to become a billionaire, not to sell his invention, Sir Tim deserves the applause of tens of thousands in the Olympic Stadium and many millions more around the world. (Apparently, the US network anchors at NBC had no idea who Sir Tim was and one of their commentators suggested 'Googling' him – not realising that without Berners-Lee there would be no Google.)

In an exclusive interview with John Naish that appeared in *The Inquirer* a year ago, Berners-Lee connected his desire to keep the internet open and free to his own Unitarian Universalist faith.

'The power of the web is in its universality. Access by everyone regardless of disability is an essential aspect,' he says. 'Unitarianism and the internet have got very much the same openness and respect for the people's issues. As a community, the UU are based on the rights and dignity of each human being.' At the opening ceremonies, he shortened that complex idea just a bit when he typed into a computer on stage: 'This is for Everyone'. That first Twitter entry done from the Olympic games flashed in lights across the stadium and across the world. Perhaps few who saw it would have connected Sir Tim's message back to our faith, but it was good to see it there.

Just as it was wonderful to see a person who has genuinely changed our world get to stand up and take a bow.

— MC Burns

### Correction

In the 4 August issue of *The Inquirer*, the attribution for a meditation by the Rev Joy Croft was incorrect. It was from the book *'With Heart and Mind'*. That volume was edited by David Dawson and published by the Worship Panel. Copies are available from Essex Hall (address left) for £6 plus p&p.



# They puncture our pomposity

Without young people, our churches could end up carpet warehouses says **Bill Darlison**

On a number of occasions over the past two years, as I've taken services up and down the country, I've found myself, in my mid-60s, to be the youngest person present in the church! It's a sobering experience. Where are the young married people? Where are the babies? Why the lack of interest from those who could help build our future?

One reason is that many of our churches, while not actively hostile to the presence of young people at services, are not terribly welcoming either. We are a bit like the disciples of Jesus who were trying to prevent the children from getting close to him. Frosty looks often greet parents who bring toddlers to church and even a little bit of crying can cause disapproving heads to turn. Worshippers don't like to have their concentration disturbed, and persistent crying, as I know from experience, can seriously distract the speaker. But this shouldn't be an insuperable problem. Many churches have installed speakers outside the sanctuary – in an adjacent room, for example – allowing parents to withdraw for a short time while still being able to listen to the service. A simple, friendly announcement to this effect at the beginning of the service should be enough to alert parents to this option.

But we also need to get over our grumpy selves and appreciate that the presence of the young adds a positive dimension to a service; it becomes more of a communal, family experience, rather than a sombre, solitary one. Children bring smiles to faces. Their very presence alerts us to the realities of life, punctures our pomposity, and reminds us of something we intellectual Unitarians are apt to forget: that, as Jesus said, 'the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these' (Mark 10:14). Maya Angelou, the American poet, suffered terrible abuse and didn't speak as a child. Once, when she was giving a lecture, a mother was desperately trying to quieten a fractious child but Maya told her to stop: 'Let the child speak!' she said. Maybe, like Maya, we should be a little more tolerant of the voices of the very young.

A second reason why we have few young people is that our services are hardly designed to hold their interest. Archaic hymns, lengthy prayers and readings, earnest sermons and the like, have very limited appeal, and it is probably a good idea that children should only stay for part of such a service. But



A 'Fresh Sparks' weekend held at St Mark's Edinburgh created opportunities for inter-generational activities. This is a rehearsal for an Aesop's fable puppet show. See stories on pages 4-5.

that part should be child-friendly and child-tolerant. It should contain something which is *specifically* aimed at children – for example, a spiritual story, preferably told rather than read, with time for the children to ask questions and to make comments. My own story compilations – *The Shortest Distance: 101 Stories from the World's Spiritual Traditions* and *Concentration and Compassion: More Stories from the World's Spiritual Traditions* (available from Lulu.co.uk. at £7.50 each) – provide plenty of material for such story sessions. In addition, children can be encouraged to participate in other parts of the service – lighting the chalice, or doing a reading, for example. I was very pleased to find in Auckland that even small children took part quite unselfconsciously in the 'Joys and Concerns' sessions, lighting their candles and expressing their opinions as confidently and as cogently as the adults.

Where possible, provision should be made for children to be looked after by competent and trustworthy adults while the rest of the service continues. This involves a lot of extra work and perhaps even extra expense, but it pays great dividends. Many parents want their children to have some kind of non-dogmatic religious education and are attracted to churches which provide it. Our notice-boards should announce the fact that children are welcome, and that a children's programme is in operation.

Attracting and keeping the young must be among our priorities. With good-will and a little imagination we can make our churches more welcoming to children. If we don't, in another decade many of our congregations will have disappeared, and some of our beautiful churches will have become museums or carpet warehouses.

*The Rev Bill Darlison is a retired Unitarian minister and vice president of the Unitarian General Assembly.*



# Fresh Sparks weekend welcomed all

By Sandy Patterson

We arrived at St Mark's in Edinburgh one Saturday morning to find that the Rev John Harley, the Unitarian National Youth co-ordinator, had brought with him from London the most fantastic collection of exotic talking animals (disguised as socks). Once we'd helped them get their eyes on and look like their proper selves, these animals taught us some of the wisdom of Aesop, at the same time modelling a fulfilling activity session for children. After lunch the children headed off to Gorgie City Farm to visit some animals that could move their own jaws. Meanwhile the adults participated in a thought-provoking and challenging workshop superbly led by John.

We tried to identify the strengths of a good Children's Programme from the point of view of a child – what makes them want to come back for more? And how can we combine this with what parents want the Programme to achieve for their children? Bearing this in mind, we moved on to planning a series of sessions looking at the themes of Home, Life Stories and Bridging the Generation Gap.

We aimed to incorporate a range of types of activities, for example physical and games; arts and crafts; and opportunities for stimulating thought and reflection. John provided us with helpful suggestions relating to structuring a typical Sunday session including ideas for welcoming everyone and closing the session. It was an extremely worthwhile day that got ideas and discussion flowing, and left us with a renewed optimism for developing our Children's Programme here at St Mark's.

*Sandy Patterson is a member of St Mark's Unitarian Church, Edinburgh.*



Children and adults from Edinburgh and Dundee uncovered the exotic animals lurking in ordinary-looking socks.

## It was all just perfect

By Bea Davidson

In the morning of 19 May about 10 children and eight adults gathered in the church. We made sock puppets, played games and used our puppets to make some puppet shows.

We played pillow swap and, 'What's the time Mr Wolf?'

We made our puppets using socks, pipe-cleaners, card, feathers and googly eyes. Then we read some folk tales and made some puppet shows based on them. I think the best part of the morning was practising our puppet shows, it was fun and perfect. I would not change a thing about it.

*— Bea Davidson is an 8-year-old member of St Mark's Unitarian Church, Edinburgh.*



The tractor at Gorgie Farm was popular with youngsters from Dundee and Edinburgh Unitarians.

## Gorgie Farm was fun

By Bea Davidson

10 Children and five adults went on the bus to Gorgie Farm in the afternoon. We looked at lots of animals, stroked some of the animals and played in the park.

My favourite animal was a big goat with strange eyes. My least favourite animal was a sheep who went "BAAAAA" at me very loudly!

My favourite bit of the day was messing about, on a tractor! The afternoon was really good, but it would have been even better if we could have ridden some horses. The whole day was great and I cannot wait to do it again.



Sock puppets appeared at Sunday's service.



# 'Fresh Sparks' is not just for St Mark's

By John Harley

Many thanks to the congregation of St Mark's for inviting me along for the day. I was able to tailor-make the content of the day for their particular needs. We decided to run a workshop for families in the morning – I structured it carefully for maximum participation and fun. We started off with badge making and chalice lighting, then getting-to-know-you games, puppet making and ending with our 'grande finale' ... the puppet show, based on Aesop's Fables.

In the afternoon I aimed a workshop specifically for adult leaders of children's activities on Sundays and those who wanted to become more involved in helping out. We looked at how to structure a children's RE session, what our aims for such an activity are, how to plan a curriculum and how to access resources. We also explored some of the main challenges of running regular Sunday morning activities such as how to respond to a small group with a wide range of ages.

The following day various families performed their puppet shows during the Sunday worship, generating much entertainment and inspiration. We explored the theme of storytelling – these ancient fables helped us all make a connection with the sacredness and richness of stories in our lives.

*If you would like the Youth Department to run an activity for children and families and/or a workshop specifically for adult leaders of RE with children and young people please get in*



*Youngsters at worship at Great Hucklow. As Bill Darlison says, children's very presence alerts us to the realities of life, punctures our pomposity, and reminds us of something we intellectual Unitarians are apt to forget: that, as Jesus said, 'the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these' (Mark 10:14).*

*touch. You may want to book a Fresh Sparks day to kick start a new children's group or to develop and expand an existing group.*

*We're here to help!*

*The Rev John Harley is the General Assembly Youth Coordinator.*

## Children experience spirit in the physical

By Helen Budd

In July I was very fortunate to be able to attend The 12<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Children's Spirituality at the University of East Anglia on behalf of the Octagon Chapel. The theme was 'Spirituality and Physicality: Crossing Thresholds'.

People gathered from all the corners of the globe, including Australia, Hong Kong, Canada, USA and Scandinavia. The theme of the conference reflected the Olympics, and with perfect timing the torch relay even came through Norwich part way through the week.

A very broad and interesting programme had been organised for us, encompassing "Sport and Physical Education, Counselling's use of focusing and the felt-sense, our spiritual relationship with the natural – physical – environment, and our spiritual relationship with our own embodied selves". Key-note speakers talked to us about 'Seeking spirituality through Physical Education and Sports'; 'Your body's search for spirit: Focusing through the Felt-Sense for Children's Wellbeing: A BioSpiritual Journey' (Which introduced us to a wonderful little book 'The Little Bird Who Found Herself' which would be a great addition to any Unitarian bookshelf); 'The Spiritual Potential of Childhood: Awakening to the Fullness of Life' and 'Embodied Spirituality', brought these themes together.

Many of these talks touched on the ease with which 'Eastern' religious practice integrates the physical and the spiritual, but the wonderful closing talk on Embodied Spirituality linked in to the rich spiritual heritage of East Anglia, including Boudicca and Mother Julian to point out that this has also been true in a 'Western' context.

The many and varied workshops and seminars on offer covered a wide variety of themes relevant to those working with

children, including considerations of children's experiences of loss, and how children growing up in the very physical and sporty culture of Australia find expression for a spiritual sense of joy and wonder. Also on the agenda were clowning, shiatsu massage and labyrinth walking.

I was really glad to be able to find out more about the work being done at the Julian Shrine in Norwich for groups of children visiting, a very un-dogmatic and free approach which sounded well done. One of the highlights of the week was the visit to the Ringsfield Eco Centre in Suffolk, where groups of children, often from deprived, urban communities, are able to explore and meet nature on their own terms. Some wonderful work is being done there.

Of particular interest to Unitarian congregations, which can often be very cerebral, we explored the thresholds between the physical and the spiritual. I found myself reflecting on the issues this might raise for congregations wanting to attract younger members. Do we dismiss physical and kinetic activity as irrelevant to our spiritual journeys?

For children and young people this is not an optional add-on, but at the very core of how they interact and engage with life – perhaps adults, too, are missing out. Should we therefore be taking a look at ourselves and seeing how we can embrace both our physical and spiritual selves, and indeed whether this is a valid distinction? Something for all Unitarians to think about I think – both in terms of our personal spiritual life and the way we come together as a religious community. For more information see:

[www.childrenspirituality.org](http://www.childrenspirituality.org)

[www.ringsfield-hall.co.uk](http://www.ringsfield-hall.co.uk)

[www.biospiritual.org](http://www.biospiritual.org)

*Helen Budd is a member of the Octagon Chapel, Norwich.*



# (P)reaching a Guinness record

By Kate Taylor

He did it! On Sunday 29 July James Barry gave a sermon at the Old Meeting House, Ditchling, that lasted 31 hours, beating the Guinness record for the longest speech marathon by almost an hour. It was a great achievement. But James says that the real objective was not so much to break the record as 'to see us having a bit of fun'. 'So much of church life is a bit serious,' he adds. 'This was an opportunity for everyone to smile and put a spring in their step.'

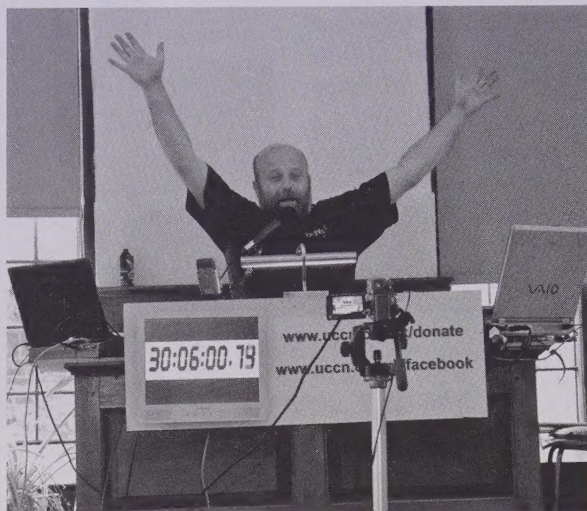
The whole event was transmitted live via the internet.

James's asked for sponsorship to raise funds for Send-a-Child-to-Hucklow, Unitarian youth activities, and Ditchling Chapel itself. He hopes that when all contributions are gathered and, with a goodly sum to come from the Inland Revenue under Gift Aid, some £3,000 will have been collected.

At the risk of giving tips to competitors, I can reveal how James stayed the course. He tried to get plenty of sleep in the days before the record-attempt. Then he undertook extensive preparation, assembling 50 pages of notes on strategically chosen topics, and almost 1,000 images. The sermon itself was interactive. Fulfilling the Guinness Book of Records' requirements, there were never fewer than ten people present in the chapel and overall the attendance was 83. In addition to questions coming from this real-life congregation, others came, via Facebook, from internet viewers. But James had a secret weapon too – his 1-year-old daughter. 'I had underestimated just how Maisie had prepared me for functioning with very little sleep,' he said.

James decided that he needed topics that he could talk about easily – on the one hand his commitment to Unitarianism (it was, after all, a *sermon*), and on the other things that had happened to him. He managed to weave Unitarian attitudes and values into a fascinating, occasionally bizarre, and sometimes moving, account of his own life. There were his two dozen motor bikes and attendant accidents, there was his life in a chicken-shed, there was a walk from Land's End to John o'Groats, there were his experiences as a wedding photographer, his Morris dancing, his playing in a folk band, and his extensive and widely ranging work in Information Technology.

But there was also his voluntary work with Venture Scouts. In 1990, James recalled, he had led a group to Romania, driving a transit van packed with clothing and milk powder for a hospice for children suffering from AIDS. What he saw led him to return a year later with a team of 25 teenagers, bent on improving conditions in a hospital for adults with mental health problems. He bartered giving help with their Information Technology for supplies from a leading DIY store, taking 50 fluorescent light tubes. Whilst in Romania the team not only installed the lighting but put up new tiles, mended broken floors, painted rooms, and created a drying area for the washing.



Less than an hour before he finished his record-breaking sermon, James Barry speaks from the pulpit at Ditchling. Photo by Mark Langley

This sermon was certainly not boring!

Rigging up the chapel for the broadband transmission was itself a challenge. James was assisted by another Unitarian technophile, Kevin Lowe, who came down from Dukinfield. Enough to say that their long hours of work and quantities of cable brought unbroken success, even enabling members of James's own family in Australia to watch the sermon live.

The marathon sermon gained extensive publicity for the Movement in the Sussex media, including an interview with James on BBC Radio Sussex, and was noticed even in *The Church Times*.

The sermon is only a preliminary. 'I think it shows us just what is available in the 21st century,' James says. The intention is to build up a team of volunteers who will oversee the regular transmission of services from Unitarian chapels across Britain.

The UKunitarian TV project was launched at the General Assembly's Visibility Strategy Group slot at this year's General Assembly. It has developed from a National Unitarian Fellowship (NUF) initiative. Assisted by a modest grant from the General Assembly's Communication Commission, a small team first created video meditations or filmed the occasional chapel service to post on the NUF website. Further enthusiasm came from the Unitarian Communication Co-ordinators Network (UCCN) and the loosely related Development of Unitarian Websites and IT (DUWIT) team. It has been driven forward by James, who heads a steering group which includes the Rev Danny Crosby, Alan Eastwood, Janet Ford, Kevin Lowe, Louise Rogers, Martin West, Joan and John Wilkinson, and Peter Zone.

'I see UKunitarianTV as a great opportunity for many different types of live events and recorded video to become available to those visiting our website,' James says, 'enabling them to sample our faith from the safety and comfort of their own home before taking the big step of coming to visit us somewhere.'

To date, although notes of its meetings are shared with the Visibility Strategy Group, the project is quite independent of the General Assembly. But the Chief Officer, Derek McAuley, confirms that the Executive Committee and the Visibility Strategy Group are following it with interest.

Donations to the sponsorship fund can be made via [www.uccn.org.uk/donate](http://www.uccn.org.uk/donate). Further news of the UKunitarian televised worship project can be found at [www.ukunitarian.tv](http://www.ukunitarian.tv). The steering group, which has recently issued its first Newsletter, would be glad to hear from any individual or chapel interested in taking part. It hopes to use some of the meetings of UCCN to give training in recording, editing, and broadcasting skills.

*Kate Taylor is a member of the Wakefield congregation.*



# Co-operative values are Unitarian ones

2012 is the UN International year of Co-operatives and because of the close links between the original Clover Street Chapel and the Rochdale Pioneers, when Rochdale Unitarians open their doors next weekend for Heritage Open Days, they will present an exhibition on Unitarian links to the Co-operative movement. Earlier in the year the chapel held a special service to commemorate these links. The Mayor and Mayoress of Rochdale attended, as did Simon Danczuk MP, Prof Stephen Yeo, chair of the Co-operative Heritage Trust and members of the local cooperative movement. **The Rev Gillian Peel**, minister of Rochdale Unitarian Church, reflects here on the Co-operatives' Unitarian ethos.



(l-r) The Rev Gillian Peel, the Mayor and Mayoress of Rochdale and Shammy Webster at Rochdale Unitarians' Co-operative exhibit. Photo by Diane Bennett

Co-operation figures large in our lives, I am sure. In a world full of unrest and division, whichever way we turn, there is a need for us to return to some of the ideals that were set down by our forebears. So it is the history of the Rochdale Pioneers and their connections with the Clover Street Unitarian Chapel in Rochdale from 1818 that I want to focus on.

When I first moved to Rochdale, about 51/2 years ago, I had no idea about the connection between the town and the Co-operative movement and even less about the connection between the church and the origins of the Co-operative Movement. Of course it doesn't take long in Rochdale to become aware of the Co-op connection when it is emblazoned on walls and bridges that greet you as you enter the town; especially this year – 'The UN International Year of Co-operatives'. The signs have become more prominent, activities and news articles abound and there has even been a film made of the history of the Rochdale Pioneers.

Recently I attended a writing workshop; when we were asked to write about our impressions after wandering round the 'Touchstones' Co-op exhibition. I wrote:

*'Lost in a time of hardship, of deprivation that lies beyond our understanding, determined to do something, those brave men set about starting something that would change things forever.'*

*Brave – why brave you might ask – well because they were standing up for ideals that were against the thinking of the time. They risked their jobs, as the ethos of what they stood for rose against the values prevalent at that time.*

*The idea was not driven by religion, but it was the values of their individual beliefs that drove them on for the 'co-operative enterprise to build a better world.'*

The times in Rochdale were hard in the 1840s and it was no wonder that the group of men known as the Rochdale Pioneers were moved to set up their co-operative. Not the first attempt by any means but it was the one that finally survived. Jack Bailey in *The British Co-operative Movement* said:

*There was no single beginning to the Co-operative Movement.*

*There were many beginnings, many failures and, until 1844, very few successes. Although most of the co-operative societies started in the 1830s collapsed, the idea lived on until Co-operation assumed a more practical and permanent form.*

*Rochdale was a town in which all the evils of the industrial*

*system were rampant in the 1840s. Wages were low, strikes and lock-outs were frequent, unemployment was rife, people incurred debts in obtaining the poor quality and often adulterated food they ate. Rochdale workers played a full part in the political agitations of the day. Many were Chartists, some were Radicals, some were Owenite Socialists.*

And some were almost certainly Unitarians from the Clover Street Chapel, which became known as the 'co-op chapel'.

Jack Bailey said:

*"Revolts grow from the anger of the people; movements grow out of their hopes. Students of social history are familiar with the work of the great social reformers and the spokesmen of the people. They are often less acquainted with the efforts of ordinary men and women, by their own endeavours, to transform their conditions of life."*

But ordinary people did change the patterns of their lives. In 1843 meetings were called in Rochdale to consider the formation of another co-operative society. And in August 1844 a general meeting of the society was called and officers were appointed.

A number of Unitarians played important roles: Miles Ashworth became the first President; his son, Samuel, was one of the first shopkeepers; James Smithies, the chief of the fighting Pioneers later became a member of the Rochdale Town council; and James Wilkinson, a pastor at the chapel for 40 years, gave the hard-working members a home on Sundays (he was known as 'the cobbler parson') and he later became an arbiter for the society. Charles Howarth, who later became president of the society, had links with the nearby Heywood Unitarian Church.

On 21 December 1844, with a share capital of £28 subscribed in coppers per week by 28 members, the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers was opened at Toad Lane. Stock consisted of small quantities of butter, sugar, flour, oatmeal and a few candles. In the cold hard conditions of the December night when they opened they found that these few candles, rather than be for sale, were needed to give them their only means of light. And so out of these small beginnings a great movement grew.

Jack Bailey says:

*What was clearly in the minds of the Pioneers was the contrast between the nature of their enterprise and that of the competitive world in which they lived. They had devised a new unity-a new conception of the people in business. In adopting the principle of one member, one vote, and applying it to men and women alike, they were anticipating rights that were (only) granted a century later in the field of citizenship.*

The rules they set down in those early times still have a radical ring to them. They included guidance on equality, political neutrality and trading. The idea of a co-operative is that the business is owned by its customers and everyone works together for a common goal, that of good service over the pursuit of profit.

(Continued on next page)



# So, how were the Downing St canapés?

By Derek McAuley

The last edition of *The Inquirer* (4 August) featured a “stop-press” news item on my attendance at a Reception at 10 Downing Street on 24 July for leaders working towards equal marriage. Several people have since asked, ‘What it was like?’ Well, 10 Downing Street is, of course, an iconic building associated with so many important events, not least changes in Government.

There is no longer free public access and security gates are in place. Identity is checked at the gates and it was somewhat bizarre to queue in front of tourists taking photographs. There is then airport-type security in a small ‘National Trust’-type hut just inside the Street. As one approaches the famous front door of No.10, it magically opens! Apparently it does not have a keyhole. Just inside, all mobile phones have to be handed in.

I suppose we intuitively know that No.10 is not like a normal house of this size and period. In a way this is correct. Yet you enter a series of small reception rooms before the main staircase. This is fairly well known with black and white engravings and photographs of Prime Ministers across the generations, yet rather bright yellow wallpaper. We proceeded downstairs and along a short corridor into the garden. You can then see that in fact this is a substantial complex of buildings with a substantial garden running along the back of the terrace of houses.

The garden has a large lawn with an L-shape around Nos.10 and 11. In one section is a children’s play area overlooked by a lovely terrace. Looking over the high wall, the seating for the Olympic beach volleyball on Horse Guards Parade was just visible.

It was a sunny evening which made it a pleasant experience for what was probably about 150 guests. Having been amongst the first to arrive, it was an excellent opportunity to introduce myself as the crowd gathered. Such events can be daunting for most people. It was good to meet colleagues from the campaign for equal marriage; particularly some I first met at the Cutting Edge Consortium conference earlier this year.

It was striking that there were – for the first time – several Anglican clerics present. The Rev Jeffrey John, dean of St Albans, recalled an occasion when he had been the only one. I was also able to renew links with Paul Martin, Chief Executive



Unitarian Chief Officer Derek McAuley (left) speaks with Prime Minister David Cameron (right) at a reception held in the garden at 10 Downing Street. Downing Street photo

of the Lesbian and Gay Foundation in Manchester, whom I knew from my previous job at Manchester Primary Care Trust where he was a non-executive Director.

Yet such events, whilst pleasant, have a genuine political purpose. For attendees it is a chance to meet with key political decision-makers and to exploit this opportunity requires being forceful in the few short minutes available. For the politician it demonstrates a commitment to an inclusive society; of more significance when the invitation comes from a Conservative Prime Minister to members of the LGBT community. The quid-pro-quo for access to those in power is the presence of a photographer. This is how politics works.

The personal invitation does reflect a recognition that our work for equal marriage, with of course allies in other faith and non-faith groups that we have cultivated, has real substance and will ultimately make a difference to the lives of individuals. Surely that is our motivation; of service to the community particularly to those often excluded.

For anyone wondering what the catering was like, I have to say the canapés were a bit disappointing.

*Derek McAuley is chief officer of the Unitarian General Assembly.*

## Rochdale Unitarians were pioneers

*(Continued from previous page)*

The Rochdale Principles were:

- Open Membership
- Democratic Control
- Dividend on Purchase – that famous ‘divi’
- Limited Interest on Capital
- Political and Religious Neutrality
- Cash Trading
- Promotion of Education

It was not surprising when we look at these ideals that a number of Unitarians were involved as they so closely link with the basic tenets of the Unitarian faith of freedom, reason and tolerance and an interest in education for all. Whoever they were though, and whichever faith they espoused in their lives, we are indebted to those 28 men. David Thompson in his Co-operative history *Weavers of Dreams* says:

*The Rochdale Pioneers studiously modified the cooperative model and put it into modern practice. They were ordinary people who created an extraordinary concept. Can we ever forget the cooperative legacy they left, which now affects millions? While others bombed, they built, and while others suppressed hope, they sought harmony. They knew that through cooperation they held the key to the future. Through perseverance and unity, their own meagre capital, and the loyal spending of their pennies at their own store, they would gain their freedom and would never lose it. A simple idea, a committed group, and a small shop. They began a revolution that brought hope to millions and harm to none. The Pioneers gave birth to the idea of modern cooperation and the world is a better place for it!*

The Rev Gillian Peel is minister at Rochdale Unitarian Church. The church, and its Co-operative exhibition will be open on 8 September 10am-4pm and 9 September noon-4pm.



# Loos, baths and a stop on Sanitary St

In the Diamond Jubilee Concert on TV in June I watched Lenny Henry, a comedian I usually enjoy, though like most of the performers he strained to be on top form. He came close to blotting his copybook with his gag to the enormous audience, "All the black people here say *Yeah!*" When a rather feeble response emerged, he replied, "Oh, well, that makes three of us!" Fair comment perhaps, when one surveyed the sea of almost exclusively white faces in the VIP seats. But it was Lenny who was actually chosen to announce the arrival of the queen.

I laughed at a delightful sequence he came out with in a TV show a year or two ago. From memory, it went something like: "When I was a kid, my mum made me go to church every week; the Pentecostal Church of God of Prophecy. (*Beaming smile*) How's that for a name for a church?"

Not like the C of E. What do they give you? (*Glum look*) St Thomas's.

St Thomas's ... *what?* ... for heaven's sake! (*Eyes roll, look up to heaven*) St Thomas's Church of the Blessed Radiance of the Epiphany, that'd be more like it!"

Definitely one for churchgoers, especially those who can't see much radiance around the C of E at the moment. But he got the laugh all right and it's something to think about for those who believe we should change our Unitarian name. How about, The Unitarian Church of the Blessed Glory of the Flaming Chalice? Lenny would approve.

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The United Reformed Church is struggling with the gay-marriage debate. The June issue of their magazine *Reform* reveals some strong liberal voices, especially in Scotland. David Coleman and Zam Walker, husband and wife ministers at Greenock West URC Church (motto: *If in doubt, try us out*) co-lead a congregation that welcomes all. Their website even advertises a 'Dinosaur Sunday', but I think that is an activity for the children rather than an invitation to more conservative types. In a lively article they write, "As a married heterosexual couple we are, ourselves, at a loss as to how affirming a same-sex couple would undermine our own marriage," and add, "Some argue that civil partnerships should give sufficient recognition to same-sex couples. But were there not perfectly good seats at the back of the bus for black people when Rosa Parks insisted on sitting at the front?"

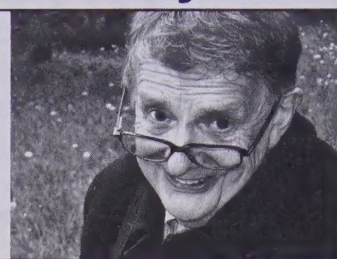
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The word 'museum' still strikes me as meaning a static, rather mournful place, steering our minds to the distant past. Nowadays, attempts are made to make them lively and interactive and the so-called 'folk' museums exhibit familiar, every-day objects. It's not unusual to hear a visitor say, viewing some domestic item, "Hey, that's not a museum piece – we've got one of those at home, in fact we're still using it!"

Visiting the National Museum of Wales in Cardiff recently I picked up an enthralling little booklet entitled *The Pithead Baths Story*. "It is difficult today to imagine the effect that these had on coalmining communities. They brought improvements to health both to mineworkers and their families, and changed the way these communities were perceived by the world outside the coalfield." In the days when miners walked home filthy to bathe in a tin bath in front of the fire, in order of family seniority, father first, eldest son and so on down to the youngest, there was danger for both the men and the women. Housekeeping meant a constant, strenuous battle against

## Funny Old World

By  
John Midgley



dirt, hauling buckets of coal to heat up gallons of hot water, leading to exhaustion, miscarriages, premature births, rheumatism and accidental burns and scalding. Change came in after a campaign by the Pithead Baths Movement, formed to convince government, the mine-owners and even some of the miners themselves that these on-site washrooms were essential. The first baths in Wales came in 1916, paid for by a levy of one (old) penny per ton on the coal. The buildings included medical facilities, a canteen, boot cleaning rooms and toilets. One shudders to think what conditions were like before they were installed, and one can understand why they came to be regarded with such appreciation, even affection. In the 1970s, singer-comedian Max Boyce lamented,

*In our little valley/ They've closed the colliery down/ And the pithead baths is a supermarket now.*

Their impact is far from forgotten and in 2007, BBC viewers voted the pithead baths at Big Pit Colliery, Wales's favourite national treasure.

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On a somewhat similar theme (stay with me) I enjoyed an encounter in July with an acquaintance from the ecumenical scene. Olive is active in the campaign for the ordination of Roman Catholic women. "That's a goal that must seem a long way off," I commented. "No, not nearly as far as people think," she replied. "It is bubbling up in discussion all over the place, far more these days than ever before." I admired her optimism and also the pleasure she takes in telling friends the name of the street where she lives. "It was built in the 1890s and was called Sanitary Street, because the dwellings were built as highly hygienic homes for the workers. Later, sensitivities and attitudes changed, so the name was altered, by pruning off the 'S' at the beginning and the 'ry' at the end. I now live in Anita Street, in the Ancoats district of Manchester. And it's now a conservation area," she beamed, proudly.

All of this suggests that our present-day concerns about health and safety probably began with well-known Victorian notions about the divine approval of cleanliness, though I prefer Oscar Wilde's version, 'Cleanliness is almost as bad as godliness!'

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There is more. Celia recently returned from a much-enjoyed Unitarian Discovery Holiday at Great Hucklow to report further impressive improvements to the Nightingale Centre. These include increased use of eco-friendly, free-of-charge natural lighting in the communal rooms, which is so effective that it is tricky to turn the lights down, even when you want to. "Also," she said, "a notice declares that with help from the Peak Park Planning Authority all the toilets in the centre have been adapted, so that they are flushed using rainwater." "Ah, well," I said, "after a summer like this one, no problem there then!"

*The Rev John Midgley is a retired Unitarian minister.*



# Letters to the Editor

## Some are rejecting freedom, reason and tolerance

To the Editor:

I was horrified to learn that some people had cancelled their subscription to 'The Unitarian' because of an article which referred to the best-seller 'Fifty Shades of Grey'.

I am aware that for many people the only experience they have had of sado-masochism etc has been through tabloid sensationalism. I think it entirely appropriate that a Unitarian publication should attempt a more intelligent commentary on the subject. Anybody who disapproves has only to write in and express that disapproval which might generate the sort of useful discussion that Unitarians are known to be fond of.

We say that we support freedom, reason and tolerance yet, over and over again, we have Unitarians rejecting all three.

To all the unsubscribers: Upper Pocklington would be proud of you.

**Dorothy Houghton**

Owesity

## Olympic Torch inspired fellowship at Godalming

To the Editor:

In answer to Cliff Read's question (*Inquirer* 4 August); Meadow Chapel was also on the Torch relay route. On 20 July just after 5.30pm the Olympic torch passed our chapel on the outskirts of Godalming, Surrey (*photo below*). The streets were busy but not packed and we all had a good view. The hall was open from around 3pm and we served refreshments at the gate to those from near and far who were waiting to see the torch, and our toilet facilities were appreciated by many! Thanks

go to all who helped with setting up, serving and clearing up afterwards. As the Global chalice lighting for July from the Danish Unitarian church says: Load no one with lavish gifts. Small presents often win great praise. With a load cut and a cup shared I found fellowship.

It was good to find fellowship with our local community and participate in our own small way in the Olympic festivities. I understand that Sevenoaks were also on the route and welcomed the Olympic Torch on the same day.

**Louise Baumberg**

Godalming Unitarians



## Discussion pack on assisted dying released

By Robert Ince

Assisted Dying is in the news again.

- In a recent High Court judgement Tony Nicklinson, who suffered from locked-in syndrome, was denied permission to have a doctor end his life. He later died.
- A Draft Bill to change the law is currently under consultation at Westminster.
- The Scottish Parliament has had a consultation and is now ready to introduce a new Bill.

As Unitarians we have no agreed position on Assisted Dying. But many congregations are considering the issue in the process of coming to an agreed position. A motion I proposed to encourage legislation to allow assisted dying which I put forward at the General Assembly in Keele. Discussion of that resolution resulted in a request to allow congregations more time to discuss and reflect upon the issues raised.

Consequently, I have put together a discussion document providing an unbiased, balanced and comprehensive view of the subject and soon, Unitarian Congregations, Ministers, District Associations and Affiliated Societies will receive this pack.

'Facts, Arguments, Personal Testimonies and Spiritual Reflections on Assisted Dying' will enable Unitarians across Britain the opportunity to consider the evidence for and against, and then discuss and express their views before a motion is presented at next year's General Assembly.

For those who can't wait or who want their own personal copy,

you can download it from the national website at <http://bit.ly/TSW9Ra> or from [www.fulwood-old-chapel.org.uk/assisted-dying](http://www.fulwood-old-chapel.org.uk/assisted-dying) (shortened at <http://bit.ly/Sjuide>). If you wish to contribute to a blog, go to [www.unitariandebate.wordpress.com](http://www.unitariandebate.wordpress.com). We would love to hear from you.

As a result of this document and the discussions around it, I very much hope, if nothing else, that Unitarians will become the best-informed and most thoughtful group of people on this subject.

Many people within the Unitarian movement have openly supported this cause; others are opposed to it and some do not think it a suitable subject on which to have a Unitarian position. So, this is clearly an issue that will be difficult to discuss and for some it will bring back memories that have been both painful and tragic. But, Unitarians throughout history have been at the forefront of social change and I believe that Assisted Dying is one of the most important issues of social justice that we shall ever undertake.

This debate is not to be taken lightly and we, as Unitarians, should consider our position. With our unique ethos we have something special to contribute – being able to look beyond the medico-legal arguments and accept that death is a fundamental part of our spiritual journey.

So, please make sure you read this pack and do something about it!

*Robert Ince is a member of the Executive Committee of the Unitarian General Assembly.*



# THE NIGHTINGALE CENTRE

As stated in our Annual Report we are currently in dialogue with the Charity Commission with a view to exploring the possibilities of a new Scheme more in tune with the antecedent charities of the Children's Holiday Home and of the Florence Nightingale Home and which would recognise the current Unitarian charitable use of the property.

The Nightingale Centre is the trading name covering five charities known collectively as The Unitarian Convalescent and Holiday Centre. The five charities are:-

1. The Florence Nightingale Home for Men.
2. Barleycrofts Convalescent Home for Women.
3. The Holiday Home, Great Hucklow.
4. The Charity for the rebuilding of The Holiday Home.
5. The Charity called the Grundy Home for Convalescent Children.

The present governing instrument is a Charity Commission Scheme dated 1<sup>st</sup> June 1964 modified by a second Scheme dated 26<sup>th</sup> February 1975. The 1975 Scheme sanctioned the GA becoming the Managing Trustee of the charities and appointed the British and Foreign Unitarian Association (an incorporated body) the Custodian Trustee. Prior to 1975 the charities were managed by the Northern Sunday School Federation.

The main purpose of the 1964 Scheme was to enable the work of the charity to be carried out in enlarged premises on one site in a more easily manageable and cost effective manner. By the early 1960s the existing Holiday Home buildings were dilapidated and no longer fit for purpose. Approval had been reached with the Peak Park Planning Board, who desperately wanted the demolition of these buildings, that planning permission would be given for a new accommodation block and a new Social Hall to be built at the Florence Nightingale Home to enable the work of the Holiday Home charity to continue on those premises. The 1964 Scheme sanctioned the money held for the rebuilding of The Holiday Home along with money held from the sale of The Grundy Home to be spent on this development. The 1964 Scheme enabled positive decisions to be taken as to the best use of the assets of the charity in changed circumstances.

However, the 1964 Scheme states simply that the property is to be, 'used as convalescent or rest homes for persons in need thereof'. This object as it stands is clearly problematic. Also the greater part of the land owned by the Centre had not been recorded in the Schedule in either the 1964 or 1975 Scheme.

We are pleased to report that the Charity Commission has now agreed to proposals for a new Scheme. The trading name will remain as *The Nightingale Centre* but the name of the charity will be changed from *The Unitarian Convalescent and Holiday Centre* to *The Nightingale Centre (Unitarian)*. It is proposed that the new object will be:-

*for the benefit of the public, to further the religious and other charitable work of the Unitarian and Free Christian Churches including:*

(a) *the relief of those in need by reason of youth, age, ill-health, financial hardship or other disadvantage; and*

(b) *the provision of facilities for the education of students of educational establishments.*

Should anyone have any concerns regarding changing the object of this charity then please write to me within 28 days of this notice being published.

Michael Tracey  
Management Committee Secretary  
23 Brandon Way  
Kingswood  
Hull  
HU7 3EL  
[michael.tracey@hemscott.net](mailto:michael.tracey@hemscott.net)



# News in brief

## Rosslyn Hill marks 150 years

On Sunday, 7 October, at 11am, Rosslyn Hill Unitarian Chapel is holding a Service of Thanksgiving and Ingathering – with a difference.

You are invited to share this special occasion, which marks the 150th anniversary of the first service in the chapel's 'new' building, conducted by the Rev Thomas Sadler in 1862.

RHUC welcomes all friends, old and new, from chapels old and new, to join in celebrating this important milestone and to share tea and cake afterwards. The chapel is on Rosslyn Hill between the Hampstead Butcher and Giraffe (Nearest underground: Hampstead. Buses: 46, 268, N5). For more information, contact our RHUC Administrator, Sharron Conduit on [admin@rhuc.org.uk](mailto:admin@rhuc.org.uk) or 020 7433 3267 or see [www.rosslyn-hillchapel.com](http://www.rosslyn-hillchapel.com)

## Time for 'Hatches, Matches and Dispatches'

If you are a lay worship leader and would like to gain more confidence in conducting Rites of Passage the following is for you. The North West Provincial Assembly is organising 'Hatches, Matches and Dispatches'. It's three sessions on Saturdays led by knowledgeable and experienced ministers and will be held at Ullet Road Unitarian Church, Sefton Park, Liverpool, L17 2AA. The program is as follows:

13 October: Marriages/Civil Partnerships with Revs Jane Barraclough and David Shaw

3 November: Funerals with the Rev Andrew Parker

10 November: Baptisms/Baby Namings with Rev Dr Vernon Marshall

Sessions will run 10am to 3.45pm. Registration is £5 and sessions are £10 each. With the total cost of the course coming to £35. For further information and to register contact the Course Administrator Dawn Buckle, 20 Wheatfield, Stalybridge, SK15 2TZ, Tel: 01457 763 721, Email: [dawnbuckle@ymail.com](mailto:dawnbuckle@ymail.com) from whom further details can be obtained.

## The 'F-Word' at Kensington Unitarians

Kensington Unitarians at Essex Church in London are hosting The F-Word exhibition, part of the Forgiveness Project from September 9-16 and full details can be found on their website [www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk](http://www.kensington-unitarians.org.uk) or by phoning 020 7221 6514 for a leaflet. To accompany the exhibition they have organised a wide range of events including a Sufi concert, storytelling for Rosh Hashanah, a dance ritual from West Africa and a Playback Theatre workshop and performance. Marian Partington, whose sister Lucy disappeared in 1973 and was later murdered by Frederick and Rosemary West, will be speaking at their 11am service on 9 September and running a workshop 'Salvaging the Sacred'. She is part of the The Forgiveness Project, founded in 2004 by journalist Marina Cantuzino, who collected personal stories of reconciliation and forgiveness for the 'F-Word' exhibition of words and images. For more information on the exhibition see: <http://theforgivenessproject.com/exhibition/>

## Thinking of training for the Unitarian ministry or lay pastorate?

Applications for training beginning in autumn 2013 should be received by Tuesday 02 October 2012. Short-listed applicants will be called for interview at Oxford on 2-3 January 2013.

For further information please contact:  
Mary-Jean Hennis at Unitarian General Assembly, Essex Hall,  
1 – 6 Essex Street, London WC2R 3HY  
Phone: 020 7240 2384  
Email: [mhennis@unitarian.org.uk](mailto:mhennis@unitarian.org.uk)

To discuss applying, please contact:  
Rev Linda Phillips  
Phone: 020 7240 2384  
Email: [lphillips@unitarian.org.uk](mailto:lphillips@unitarian.org.uk)

## Ministerial Vacancy

New Unity is formed of two congregations (Unity Church Islington and Newington Green Unitarian Church) with an integrated programme of worship, spiritual development and social action. Under their dynamic Minister, who arrived as a student, membership has grown and two services are now offered every Sunday, allowing widely differing expressions of spiritual engagement.

The Minister's initial contract expires in 2013 and the congregation seeks to fill the vacancy with a permanent called Minister. The person appointed will be a fully qualified Minister of Religion on the Roll of the General Assembly with a minimum of 5 years experience in the UK including leadership through a period of significant congregational growth and demonstrated experience working with young adults.

S/he will be able to demonstrate profound spiritual insight, strong interpersonal and pastoral skills, and a compelling vision to grow the membership both numerically and spiritually. GA scale, manse provided. Please contact Rev. Linda Phillips, Director of Ministry, The General Assembly, Essex Hall, 1-6 Essex Street, London WC2 3HY. Closing date: 30/9/12.